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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 000659

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, EUR, NEA
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LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: ACTIVIST MP SEES A PLOT UNDER EVERY STONE

REF: (A) 05 NAIROBI 2488, (B) NAIROBI 633

CLASSIFIED BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR MICHAEL J. FITZPATRICK,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Asha Haji Elmi, Somalia's most dynamic female MP, privately says she fears her life may be in danger when she attends the upcoming parliamentary session in Baidoa, but insists she will attend. Amidst swirling conspiracy theories, she claimed that all facts point to underhanded agreements between the President and the Speaker to ensure the political longevity of the Prime Minister. Asha swore to make the Speaker the first to fall if he attempts to thwart the will of Parliament. She omitted to develop a national agenda for the Parliament's Baidoa session, including the replacement of the current Council of Ministers with a body able to work for the good of the country. END SUMMARY

PERSONAL SECURITY FEARS

2. (C) Somalia Watcher met February 13 with Asha Haji Elmi, Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP) MP and director of a Mogadishu-based NGO, Save Somali Women and Children. Asha has been very active in Somali politics for a number of years. She played a significant role as the only woman on the six-member coordinating committee at the Arta, Djibouti conference that resulted in the 2001 creation of the stillborn Transitional National Government of President Abdiqasim Salad Hassan. She was a leading figure in pushing a civil society agenda throughout the Somalia National Reconciliation Conference (SNRC) in Kenya, 2002-2004, while insisting that the inclusion of the major Somali warlords was critical to any effort to return governance to Somalia. She was also a key organizer within civil society and women's groups in June 2005, pushing the Mogadishu warlords to remove their men and roadblocks from the capital, and squeezing funds from the business community to pay for temporary cantonment of the militiamen (reftel A).

3. (C) Asha told Somalia Watcher that her first concern

regarding attendance at a February 26 session of parliament in Baidoa was for her own safety. She opined that her outspoken views and strong opposition to Ethiopian interference in Somali affairs put her at the top of Addis Ababa's "hit list". She claimed that the Somali regions of Bakool, Hiran, and Bay (where Baidoa is located) are the playground of Ethiopian operatives, and said she wouldn't be surprised if she and other activists met with "accidents" at some point during the parliament's meeting. Asha floated the idea that in fact, this parliamentary session should be held outside Somalia, but admitted that such a move would kill the institution, showing that the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs) were unable to function inside the country. She therefore insisted that she would attend the Baidoa session, whatever the risks.

THERE MUST BE A CATCH

¶4. (C) Asha expressed a strong conviction that something underhanded was going on among the Transitional Federal President, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed; the Speaker of the TFP, Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden; the Prime Minister, Ali Mohammed Gedi; and the governments of Ethiopia and Italy. She speculated that the only way to have obtained the PM's acquiescence to allow parliament to meet in Baidoa instead of his "interim capital" of Jowhar was to have assured him that he would play a key role in setting the parliamentary agenda. This would allow the PM, with the support of the Speaker and the President, to keep substantive issues off the agenda, including any attempt to table a motion of no confidence in the PM and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG -- defined as the PM and his Council of Ministers).

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She repeated what we have heard a number of times -- that Ethiopia has decided to back the President and the Speaker in pushing for a session of parliament, and that the PM, with backing from Italy, is seeking to turn the session into a committee-creating forum, that will operate in a "workshop" format designed to build the institutional capabilities, but not to confront any of the unresolved conflicts of the past year.

A NATIONAL AGENDA

¶5. (C) Asha Haji Elmi told Somalia Watcher she was committed to ensure that the parliament would not be "hijacked" into protecting the PM or his non-functioning Council of Ministers. She threatened to push for the impeachment of the Speaker -- her long-time political ally -- should he attempt to use his influence over the parliamentary agenda to shield the PM. In her view, this session of parliament must tackle head-on the issues of reconciliation that were skipped over during the SNRC in the participants' hurry to get directly to a division of the positions of power through the naming of a parliament and government. And, with the PM having become such a divisive figure, unable to unite a session of his Council of Ministers, a first order of business would have to be determining whether he has the confidence of the parliament.

BUYING THE VOTES? WITH WHAT?

¶6. (C) Asha stated that MP/Minister for National Security/Warlord Mohamed Qanyare Afrah had told her during the week of February 6 that emissaries from the PM had approached him to find out his price for support. Asha reported that Qanyare asked how much the PM had in hand for his lobbying effort in the parliament; when told the total vote-buying fund was \$50,000, the "Minister" pointed out that such a risible sum would barely buy his vote alone, and offered to contribute \$500 to the fund.

COMMENT

17. (C) In this conversation, Asha was notable for her lack of focus and clarity of thought. She intermingled fears of Ethiopian death squads and willingness to disrupt the parliament with rumors of Ethiopian plots -- to ensure the parliament meets. She wove conspiracy theories putting the Speaker on every side of the debate, now pushing to install Qanyare as PM, now shielding Gedi from a no-confidence vote. We see her stories and concerns not so much as reflecting a reality on the ground, but rather as reflection of the deep confusion and ambivalence many Somali political and civil society activists are feeling about finally sitting in parliament. They readily admit that the TFIs must be declared a failure, and dead, if the parliament cannot manage to come together in a plenary session inside Somalia. At the same time, they fear what will happen if such a session occurs. END COMMENT.

BELLAMY